

FEEDING YOUR CHIHUAHUA PART I: KIBBLE

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There are so many opinions, brands and price ranges to choose from when picking a food for your chihuahua that it can be overwhelming to the average consumer. Some will choose a food recommended by their vet or breeder, some will go with the most advertised product, and some, the cheapest. None of the above reasons are sufficient to determine what your dog will be eating everyday. For a chihuahua's tiny mouth, cost should not be a contributing factor, especially since the wrong diet can lead to flaky, dry skin and coat, allergies, ear infections, "hot spots", digestive problems, low immunity and more. It is worth the cost to choose a high quality dog food- you will save money in veterinary bills in the long run and have a healthier, more beautiful pet. It is a big mistake, however, to simply go with the recommendation of someone without doing your own research.

One option that many people settle on when deciding on a diet for their chihuahua is kibble. There are decent formulas and there are terrible formulas, but it can be difficult to tell one from the other. The number one rule to follow when choosing a kibble is to **READ THE LABEL**, and to know what those ingredients actually are, and how they affect your chihuahua's health. Also, be aware that ingredients are listed in order of highest content by weight to least. So, if a food lists corn as the first ingredient, this means you are buying a product that contains more corn than anything else. If a product lists lamb, ground rice, rice gluten, rice bran, - you are **STILL** getting a bag of food that contains more grain than anything else, because when you add up all of that rice, it amounts to more than the amount of lamb. This is a deceitful way some companies label their food to make you believe you are getting more meat- don't be fooled. An honest way of labeling this food would be: rice, lamb, etc.

PROTEIN SOURCES

The first thing you should look for on the label is a high quality protein source listed first (and not followed by grain listed three or four times in fragments.) By high quality, this means **NO** "meat and bone meal"!

The protein should be in the form of a "meal", like "chicken meal" "lamb meal", etc. If just the meat is listed alone ("chicken", "lamb", etc.) that means that the meat was weighed before processing, while it still contained water. Meat contains up to 80% water. After the water is removed from the meat to make the kibble, you can be sure it is

NOT the first ingredient by weight anymore- it is only a small portion of the grain-based kibble.

By-products are a part of the dog's natural diet, but only a very small percentage. They should never make up a significant portion of the protein in a kibble. If a by-product meal is listed as one of the first few ingredients in the food, that is because the manufacturer is trying to cut costs by using inferior ingredients as the main protein source. "Meat and bone meal" may be ANY meat, including meat from dying and diseased animals, or animals that arrived at the processing plant dead.

Dairy products are not a good source of protein for dogs. They are difficult to digest, allergenic and promote excess mucous formation. Goat's milk is a healthy, easily digestible alternative, but is not found in commercial pet foods due to its higher cost.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT CARBOHYDRATES

All dry dog foods will contain a *significant* amount of carbohydrate- some contain more than 70%, and *all* are made up of at least 50% grain or starch. It is a scientifically proven fact that dogs, even pregnant and lactating bitches, have **zero** dietary requirement for carbohydrates. Carbohydrates such as wheat, barley, corn, potatoes, etc. are only added to kibble to make it stick together for the extrusion process and to make it economical to manufacture (and profitable to sell!) Carbohydrates are not necessary to provide dogs with energy- dogs efficiently metabolize protein and fats for energy. Another common misconception is that dry food is good for a dog's teeth- but this is completely false due to the carbohydrate content inherent in all kibble. When chewed, kibble turns into a starch-based mush that sticks to the teeth, is converted into sugars, and causes plaque and gum disease. For these reasons, *it is not desirable to feed kibble alone as a staple diet*, although it may have a place in your dog's diet due to its undisputable convenience and cost effectiveness.

Many dogs are allergic to wheat, barley, rye and corn. Wheat, barley and rye contain gluten, while corn contains indigestible cellulose. These are difficult ingredients to digest, and with daily ingestion, can cause new allergies to be formed where none existed. The reason for this is that due to their gluten content/ structure they become sticky in the digestive tract and act like glue, slowing down the digestive process and creating irritation. This irritation eventually causes the lining of the gut to become porous, allowing protein molecules to "leak" out which are then attacked by the body's immune system, and antibodies are formed towards the foods the dog previously had no allergic reaction to. This also leads to low immunity as the body is using too much energy fighting off foods, and can lead to chronic unwellness, which manifests itself as flaky skin, poor coat, ear infections, excessive tearing, digestive disorders and other ailments.

Carbohydrate sources that do not contain gluten, and will not clog the digestive system and/or create allergies to the extent that wheat, barley, rye and corn do, include: sweet potatoes, millet, whole brown rice, and oats.

If kibble must be fed as the staple diet, these are the only acceptable ones to find on the ingredient label- the lesser of the evils, so to speak.

Rice listed on the label should be whole- not white or fragmented such as “brewer’s” rice (leftover, broken fragments of white rice- a by-product of the milling process) or flour. Rice bran is a good source of vitamins and coat conditioners- but if the food were to simply use whole grain brown rice, the bran would be included without having to be listed separately. Because the bran has been removed from it, white rice is not as nutritious as brown rice.

“GRAIN FREE” DOG FOODS

All of the "grain free" kibble formulas contain potatoes or tapioca. Potatoes contain toxins, including solanine, in their raw state that are not 100% removed by cooking, and it is not a good idea to consistently use any kibble that contains them. Both potatoes and tapioca also have a very high glycemic index, which basically means that they turn into pure sugar quickly after they are ingested and may contribute to diabetes and obesity. These "Grain free" kibbles are simply a *marketing tactic* to get raw feeders or people thinking about feeding raw to buy their kibble. These foods are not raw substitutes at all- they are fully cooked and full of starch. The high ash content in these foods is also a major concern.

Grain free formulas don't contain any less starch than other types of kibble- the only difference is that the starch is in the form of potato or tapioca instead of rice or millet, which are far healthier.

While on the subject of marketing, please keep in mind that the pet food business is a very lucrative one (retail pet food sales alone accounted for an estimated 14.3 billion dollars in 2004, according to APPMA projections) and most of the time, the quality of their marketing is much better than the quality of their products. You absolutely cannot trust TV commercials or pretty bags with healthy sounding names to be guidelines to how you feed your dog!

FATS and PRESERVATIVES

Fats are a very important component of a dog's diet. They play an important role in skin and coat health and even immunity. High quality fats include chicken fat, olive oil, rice bran oil, walnut oil, etc. A great dog food should also include a source of omega 3 fatty

acids, such as: flax seed, flax seed oil, herring, salmon, tuna or fish oil. Menhaden fish is NOT recommended. It is not sold for human consumption and is preserved with ethoxyquin before being sold to the pet food manufacturer. This harmful chemical preservative is not required to be listed on the ingredients label.

One particular fat to stay away from is “animal fat” (again, this may include ANY animal) and it is important to notice how the fat is preserved. BHA and BHT are chemical preservatives that are banned for human consumption in many countries. Propylene Glycol is another chemical to steer clear of. Make sure that the food you buy is naturally preserved. Some acceptable natural preservatives are: mixed tocopherols (vitamin E), vitamin C and citric acid.

ADDITIVES:

There is absolutely no reason to use artificial colors, flavors and sweeteners in a pet food! Your dog doesn't care what color his food is and artificial colors have been linked to cancer, allergies and behavior disorders. Stay far away from any product that lists “red40”, “yellow5”, “yellow6”, “caramel color” etc. Also, do not buy any food that contains sugar or corn syrup. There is no room in a meat eater's diet for these unhealthy ingredients, and they lead to an increased risk of diabetes and obesity. Some natural products list “natural flavors” and “natural caramel color”. These are far better alternatives.

“Animal digest” is used as a flavoring agent in low quality pet foods. Just like “animal fat” and “meat and bone meal”, you'll never know where the meat came from. A high quality dog food will be palatable without having to add ingredients like this.

Menadione sodium bisulfite, sometimes listed as other forms of menadione or simply as “vitamin K supplement” is easy to miss because it is hidden in the middle of a long list of vitamin and mineral supplements. This is an unnecessary additive, as vitamin K is easily obtained through other food sources, yet many brands of dog food contain this harmful ingredient. Menadione derived vitamin K supplements are banned for use in human food because of their toxic properties, and hopefully one day will be removed from all dog foods as well. Until that day, check the label for any form of “menadione” or “vitamin K supplement”.

Tomato pomace is added to some dry foods as a fiber source. This consists of ground tomato skins and pulp, and may contain higher than average levels of pesticides. This is not a healthful ingredient.

“NATURAL” KIBBLES ARE NOT ALL CREATED EQUAL

Don't be fooled by some companies who call their foods “all natural” but use a lot of cheap fillers and/or low quality ingredients. One tremendously popular natural pet food is guilty of shamefully deceitful ingredient listing. In their lamb and rice formula, they list rice in four different parts- you will find rice flour, ground rice, rice bran, and rice gluten on the label. If you were to put all those parts together, you would end up with whole grain brown rice, but because of the way they list it, they are able to list lamb meal as the first ingredient by weight. A vet-recommended brand's “all natural” formula adult dog food contains brewer's rice as the first ingredient, not to mention wheat, corn, soy, animal fat, etc. One major brand's popular supermarket food has a name that implies it will benefit your dog and is healthful. There are pictures of fresh vegetables on the pretty bag, but when you turn it over and read the ingredients, it is obvious that it will do anything BUT benefit your dog.

EXAMPLES OF INFERIOR DRY FOODS

Now that you know what to look for on a dog food label, let's look at the label of a popular, vet recommended diet. The following is a list of ingredients in the canine adult formula:

CHICKEN, CORN MEAL, GROUND GRAIN SORGHUM, GROUND WHEAT, CHICKEN BY-PRODUCT MEAL, BREWERS RICE, SOYBEAN MEAL, ANIMAL FAT (PRESERVED WITH MIXED TOCOPHEROLS AND CITRIC ACID), CHICKEN LIVER FLAVOR, VEGETABLE OIL, DRIED EGG PRODUCT, FLAXSEED, PRESERVED WITH MIXED TOCOPHEROLS AND CITRIC ACID, MINERALS (SALT, CALCIUM CARBONATE, POTASSIUM CHLORIDE, DICALCIUM PHOSPHATE, FERROUS SULFATE, ZINC OXIDE, COPPER SULFATE, MANGANOUS OXIDE, CALCIUM IODATE, SODIUM SELENITE), ROSEMARY EXTRACT, BETA-CAROTENE, VITAMINS (CHOLINE CHLORIDE, VITAMIN A SUPPLEMENT, VITAMIN D3 SUPPLEMENT, VITAMIN E SUPPLEMENT, L-ASCORBYL-2-POLYPHOSPHATE (A SOURCE OF VITAMIN C), NIACIN, THIAMINE MONONITRATE, CALCIUM PANTOTHENATE, PYRIDOXINE HYDROCHLORIDE, RIBOFLAVIN, FOLIC ACID, BIOTIN, VITAMIN B12 SUPPLEMENT).

This “food” consists primarily of grains. They list chicken first, but it only weighs more than the corn meal because of its high water content (which is removed before making the kibble), and three different grains are listed after it. As if that weren't bad enough, the grains include corn and wheat which are difficult to digest and allergenic. Next, chicken by-product meal is listed- basically the main protein source in this food, which would only make up a very small portion of a dog's natural diet and is used here because it is cheap. Next, more grain- and this time we see brewer's rice which has been stripped of its most nutritious component- the bran, and soybean meal- indigestible and again, cheap.

For fat, “animal fat” is listed-very low quality and of unknown origin. The “vegetable oil” they list is the cheapest on the market- it's soybean oil-low in important fatty acids and unable to make up for their poor quality animal fat. Way, way down on the list you'll see flax seed- a source of important omega 3 fatty acids- unfortunately, it is listed so far down on the ingredient list, that there probably isn't enough of it in there to do your dog any good.

This is supposedly “premium” pet food. Tremendous profit is made from selling this garbage, as it is composed of cheap ingredients and marketed to look like caviar. This isn’t even the worst. Take a look at any bag of food in the supermarket etc, and you’ll be horrified at their use of low quality ingredients, excessive carbohydrate, allergenic ingredients, chemical preservatives, etc. Most of the household name brands that advertise on television are just as bad, if not worse.

Here are the ingredients in a very popular adult maintenance food sold in supermarkets:

GROUND YELLOW CORN, MEAT AND BONE MEAL, CORN GLUTEN MEAL, CHICKEN BY-PRODUCT MEAL, ANIMAL FAT (PRESERVED WITH BHA/BHT), WHEAT MILL RUN, NATURAL POULTRY FLAVOR, RICE, SALT, POTASSIUM CHLORIDE, CARAMEL COLOR, WHEAT FLOUR, WHEAT GLUTEN, VEGETABLE OIL, VITAMINS (CHOLINE CHLORIDE, DL-ALPHA TOCOPHEROL ACETATE [SOURCE OF VITAMIN E], L-ASCORBYL-2-POLYPHOSPHATE [SOURCE OF VITAMIN C*], VITAMIN A SUPPLEMENT, THIAMINE MONONITRATE [VITAMIN B1], BIOTIN, D-CALCIUM PANTOTHENATE, RIBOFLAVIN SUPPLEMENT [VITAMIN B2], VITAMIN D3 SUPPLEMENT, VITAMIN B12 SUPPLEMENT), TRACE MINERALS (ZINC SULFATE, COPPER SULFATE, POTASSIUM IODIDE)

The first ingredient is indigestible, allergenic corn. The second is the cheapest and most inferior source of protein available- mystery meat. Third we have more corn- this time used as a cheap protein source. Next, chicken by-product meal- another low cost ingredient to supplement the inferior protein sources used in this food. Animal fat is a very inexpensive, inferior fat source, better described as “mystery fat”. It is preserved with chemicals that are banned for use in other countries, and rightly so. Wheat mill run is an extremely cheap filler ingredient, and poultry flavor is added to make a dog actually want to eat the food. There is also excess salt in the food and artificial color added. Here is a prime example of why my motto is “STAY OUT OF THE PET FOOD AISLE IN THE GROCERY STORE!” (And use caution in the dog food aisle at the pet store!)

EXAMPLES OF ACCEPTABLE DRY FOODS

The following is an example of one of the better kibbles on the market today. This food is easy to find and relatively inexpensive. Here are the ingredients in the maintenance formula for all life stages:

CHICKEN MEAL, TURKEY MEAL, BROWN RICE, WHITE RICE, LAMB MEAL, CHICKEN FAT (PRESERVED WITH MIXED TOCOPHEROLS), HERRING MEAL, FLAX SEED, SUN CURED ALFALFA MEAL, SUNFLOWER OIL, CHICKEN, LECITHIN, MONOCALCIUM PHOSPHATE, POTASSIUM CHLORIDE, CHOLINE CHLORIDE, LINOLEIC ACID, ROSEMARY EXTRACT, SAGE EXTRACT, DRIED ENTEROCOCCUS FAECIUM, DRIED LACTOBACILLUS ACIDOPHILUS FERMENTATION PRODUCT, DRIED ASPERGILLUS ORYZAE FERMENTATION EXTRACT, DRIED BACILLUS SUBTILIS FERMENTATION EXTRACT, INULIN (FROM CHICORY ROOT), SACCHAROMYCES CEREVISIAE FERMENTATION SOLUBLES, YUCCA SCHIDIGERA EXTRACT, MIXED TOCOPHEROLS (SOURCE OF VITAMIN E), ZINC AMINO ACID CHELATE, MANGANESE AMINO ACID CHELATE, IRON AMINO ACID CHELATE, COPPER AMINO ACID CHELATE, COBALT AMINO ACID CHELATE, VITAMIN A SUPPLEMENT, VITAMIN D3 SUPPLEMENT, ASCORBIC ACID (SOURCE OF VITAMIN C), NIACIN, THIAMINE MONONITRATE (VITAMIN B1), RIBOFLAVIN (SOURCE OF B2), BETA CAROTENE, CALCIUM PANTOTHENATE, PYRIDOXINE HYDROCHLORIDE (VITAMIN B6), CALCIUM IODATE, FOLIC ACID, D-BIOTIN, SODIUM SELENITE, PAPAYA, VITAMIN B12 SUPPLEMENT.

The first two ingredients are high quality sources of protein. Meats are in the form of meal, which is highly concentrated. Whole grain rice is used, with more brown rice than white rice – and no brewer’s rice or rice particles. Chicken fat is used as a source of fatty acids and it is preserved naturally. Also included are two sources of omega 3 fatty acids- herring meal and flax. Since the fish is listed as “human grade” on their website, it will not contain ethoxyquin. Probiotics are added to the food for intestinal health, which is a nice bonus. There are no chemical preservatives, artificial flavors or artificial colors in this food. It is also gluten-free, does not contain menadione-derived vitamin K, and has no added sugar or salt. The things that you will NOT find in a good food are just as important as the things you should look for.

Here is list of ingredients from another well-formulated kibble:

FRESH BISON MEAT, SALMON MEAL, MILLET, SWEET POTATOES, OATS, FLAXSEED, CARROT, WATERCRESS, SPINACH, CELERY, PARSLEY, FENNEL SEED, WILD SALMON OIL, ATLANTIC KELP, ALFALFA, POTASSIUM CHLORIDE, CURRANTS, CRANBERRIES, PEARS, FIGS, THYME, ANISE SEED, GROUND CINNAMON BARK, FENUGREEK, GARLIC PIECES, SUNFLOWER SEEDS, SESAME SEEDS, APPLES, CHICORY ROOT, SPIRULINA, CHOLINE CHLORIDE, LECITHIN, PROBIOTICS: (LACTOBACILLUS ACIDOPHILUS, LACTOBACILLUS CASEI, LACTOBACILLUS LACTIS, BACILLUS BIFIDUM, STREPTOCOCCUS DIACETILACTIS, BACILLUS SUBTILLUS), TAURINE, MIXED TOCOPHEROLS (A SOURCE OF VITAMIN E), LYSINE, ZINC PROTEINATE, IRON PROTEINATE, MANGANESE PROTEINATE, THIAMINE, METHIONINE, CARNITINE, NIACIN, VITAMIN A SUPPLEMENT, CALCIUM PANTOTHENATE, RIBOFLAVIN SUPPLEMENT, VITAMIN B12 SUPPLEMENT, IODINE PROTEINATE, VITAMIN D3 SUPPLEMENT, BIOTIN, FOLIC ACID, PYRIDOXINE (A SOURCE OF VITAMIN B6), COBALT PROTEINATE, PAPAINE, YUCCA SCHIDIGERA EXTRACT.

The first ingredient is primarily water and will not be the first ingredient by weight after it is processed to manufacture the kibble. However, the second ingredient is a high quality protein meal, so you can be sure this is a meat-based formula. The added benefit of the salmon is that it is high in omega-3 fatty acids, which are wonderful for skin and coat health, as well as immunity. Millet, sweet potatoes and oats are all gluten-free and easier to digest than other carbohydrate sources. Flaxseed is a healthy source of fiber, protein and omega-3 fatty acids. The rest of the ingredients contain many healthful extras such as probiotics, vegetables, fruits, seeds and herbs. The manufacturer of this food states that it contains at least 50% meat, which is more than any other kibble on the market today. The manufacturer also recommends adding fresh raw food to the diet, even though that may cut their profits by reducing the amount of their product you are using. That honesty and wish for what is best for your dog’s health is impressive.

In Part II of “Feeding Your Chihuahua”, topics covered will include: supplementing kibble with fresh foods, canned food, freeze-dried food and treats.

RESOURCES:

[Going Gluten Free](#)

[Carbohydrates and the dog's diet](#)

[More about grains and pet health](#)

[BARF and the Question of Grain, by Dr. Billinghurst](#)

[Digestion and the anatomy of the canine](#)

[Contrasting grain-based and meat-based diets fed to dogs](#)

[Dogs: Problems cause by dry feeds, from the Anglian Wolf Society](#)

[To Feed or Not To Feed Grains](#)

******[Commercial Pet Food Article by *Dr. Wendell O. Belfield*](#)

[What's really in pet food \(references at bottom\)](#)

[Dog Food Exposed \(dirty secrets of the dog food industry\)](#)

[Pet Food and Nutrition](#)

[Overview of Nutrition for Dogs and Cats](#)

[The Dog Food Project- ingredients to avoid](#)

[The Dog Food Project: Identifying better products](#)

